

“First” by E A Terry Delivered 2-24-19
2nd Corinthians 8: 1 – 15; 2nd Corinthians 9: 6 – 15; 1st Corinthians 16: 1 – 4;
1st Kings 17: 1 – 24

First a little background.

Last week we looked at Elijah delivering a message to King Ahab that King Ahab did not want to hear.

Elijah said, ***“As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word”*** (1st Kings 17:1b).

In that day a person could be killed for bringing bad news to the king.

Then in verses 2 and 3 we read that God told Elijah to go and hide in the Kerith Ravine east of Jordan and that the ravens would bring Elijah bread and meat in the morning and in the afternoon (1st Kings 17:2).

This was a test of faith for Elijah. 1st Kings 17:5 tells us Elijah was obedient and verse 6 tells us God did what God said He would do. Elijah passed his test of faith

After a while the brook dried up because there had not been any rain in the land.

When the brook dried up verse 8 tells us that God told Elijah to go to Zarephath and that a widow would provide food for him.

This was another test of faith for Elijah.

Again, a widow in a foreign country did not sound like a likely place to have Elijah’s physical needs met. But Elijah obeyed God. (1st Kings 17:10)

When Elijah got to Zarephath he saw a widow woman gathering sticks at the city gate.

Elijah said to her; ***“Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?”***

In that day giving a stranger a drink of water was considered to be a duty. Remember Jesus asked a Samaritan woman, ***“Please give me a drink.”*** (John 4:7)

Giving Elijah a drink may have been inconvenient, but it did not require a sacrifice on the widow’s part.

But then Elijah upped the ante. ***“As she was going to get Elijah a drink Elijah said, ‘And bring me, please, a piece of bread’”*** (1st Kings 17:11).

The widow responded by saying; ***“As surly as The Lord your God lives; I do not have any bread- only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug.”***

Notice the widow said; ***“the Lord your God”***

When we first read this we think Elijah was selfish because Elijah was asking for this widow’s last meal that she and her son would have before they died of starvation.

But we need to remember God had told Elijah that a widow in Zarephath would feed him (1st Kings 17:9).

Giving food to Elijah was a test of faith for The Widow Of Zarephath.

Remember she was not an Israelite.

This widow lived in a region where Baal worship was practiced and she and her son were faced with starvation.

This widow was being asked to give Elijah the only food she had and to trust God to supply all of her needs.

“Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what The LORD, the God of Israel, says; “The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land”” (1st Kings 17:13-14).

This widow was asked to give all that she had to a prophet of God that she did not know.

This story is about faith and this story is about trusting God to supply all of our needs.

But more importantly this story provides us with a valuable lesson in stewardship.

As you know, a steward is a person who has been given the responsibility of managing another person’s property.

When most people hear the word stewardship they think about money.

But stewardship also includes the way we use the time and the talents God has given to us.

Stewardship includes the way we choose to use every thing God has entrusted to us.

When Elijah told the widow ***“For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land.’”*** (1st Kings 17:14)

God was saying; *If you put me first and trust me then I will provide for you.* When you and I put God first then God puts us first.

This is a promise God makes to each of us today.

You see, the fulfillment of God’s promises to us are often dependent upon our obedience to His Word.

What do you think would have happened if the widow had said; *first show me the miracle of the flour and oil then I will make you a cake of bread?*

God provided for all of this Gentile widow's needs because this widow believed God's promise at a time when the people of Israel were starving because Israel had turned away from God and Israel was disobeying God.

Listen again to what Elijah said.

“But first make me a small cake from what you have and bring it to me. Then make something for yourself and your son” (1st Kings 17:13b).

You see, God expects us to give to Him first!

In Deuteronomy 26:1-11 we can read about first fruits.

“take some of the first fruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name...”

The key to stewardship is that little word ***“first”***.

Jesus said; ***“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”*** (Matthew 6:33).

Just as God promised the widow of Zarephath that the flour and oil would not run out, God has promised to provide for all of our needs ***if*** we put Him first in our life.

Giving to The Lord first is a test of our faith.

Giving to The Lord first is trusting The Lord to miraculously increase what we have left after we give.

You see God holds us accountable for everything He has entrusted to us.

God never expects more from us than what God first gives to us.

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17)

Remember it is The Lord who gives you the physical ability, the mental ability, and the opportunity to earn money.

“But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.” (Deuteronomy 8:18)

In our lesson from 1st Corinthians 16 we are told that on the first day each week we are to set aside our offering.

This means we are to give an offering ***every*** week; not just on the Sundays we come to worship.

This verse also means that our offering to The Lord should be our first priority.

We are to set aside our offering before we spend any of our paycheck.

We are to pray about how much we are to give to The Lord each week.

Our offering is not to come out of what is left over after we pay our bills.

Today's culture puts many demands on our time, our talents, and on our money.

It is a proven fact that unless we put The Lord first we will always short change The Lord.

Many Christians practice what is known as; *residual stewardship* which means we give God the very best of our leftovers.

In other words, we put money in the offering on Sunday **if** we have any money left after we pay our bills and after we have fed our materialistic appetite.

Many of us are also guilty of giving The Lord our leftover time and our leftover talents.

Most of us are guilty of putting The Lord last even though The Lord put us first when He came to die on the cross to pay the price of our sins.

The Bible records a number of wonderful promises God makes to His people who put Him first and who give generously to Him because they love The Lord.

For example, listen to Luke 6:38: ***“Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”***

In our lesson from 2nd Corinthians 9:6, we read, ***“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”***

And ***“God loves a cheerful giver”*** (2nd Corinthians 9:7b).

“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2nd Corinthians 9:8).

In 1st Chronicles 29:14 we read, ***“But who am I, and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”***

Proverbs 11:24 tells us; ***“One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.”***

Every Christians should be eager to generously give to The Lord because they are so thankful for Jesus saving them from spending eternity in hell.

Jesus warned us when He said; ***“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in***

heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”
(Matthew 6:19-20)

Remember, when you bring your offering each Sunday you are not giving to the church.

You are giving to The Lord through His church.

You see, stewardship is about believing God’s promises and trusting God to provide for all of your needs.

When we refuse or we neglect to give The Lord a small portion of what The Lord has entrusted to us, we are saying, *“God what I have is mine and I will choose how I want to use it.”*

When we refuse or neglect to give The Lord what is His, we are saying, *“Lord, I do not trust you to provide for all of my needs.”*

When we bring our offering to The Lord we show our gratitude for The Lord’s blessings and we are saying, *“Lord, I believe that 90% of what I have after I bring you my offering to you with joy and thanksgiving will go further than 100% of what I have if I neglect or fail to first bring my offering to you.”*

God does not need your money, after all He created the universe and God owns everything in the universe.

Friends, we are the ones who need to bring our offering to The Lord!

Giving generously to The Lord is just as important part of worship as praise and prayer are.

The way we choose to spend the time, the talents, and the money God has entrusted to us is a test of our love for The Lord, a test of our faith, a test of our trust, and a test of our obedience.

If you will carefully study the miracles that Jesus performed while He was on earth you would find that Jesus told the people to bring what they had before Jesus performed the miracle.

A small offering results in a small miracle.

A generous offering brought in love and faith will always result in a much larger miracle.

God’s word to us today challenges each of us to ask ourselves; *“Who am I trusting to provide for all of my needs?”*

I want to close with an illustration of how God feels when we are reluctant to give Him what rightly belongs to Him.

A father wanted to do something really nice for his son and his daughter so he took them to McDonalds and bought each of them a large order of French Fries.

As his son and daughter were eating the French Fries the father asked his son, *“May I have a few of your fries”?*

The son answered, *“No, I want all of them.”*

So then the father asked his daughter, but the daughter answered, *“I will give you some if I have any left.”*

If you were that father how would you feel?

Remember that father took his son and daughter to McDonalds and that father bought the French Fries with his money.

I know I would feel hurt and sad that my children were so ungrateful and so stingy.

That is how The Lord feels when we refuse to give Him a small part of what The Lord has freely given to us.

God’s word to us this morning challenges all of us to put The Lord first.

“They gave themselves first to The Lord ...” (2nd Corinthians 8:5)

The key to Christian stewardship is that little word ***“first”***.

You see the way you choose to spend the time, the talents, and the money God has entrusted to you is a test of your faith; a test to see if you really believe that The Lord will provide for all of your needs?

The first step to being a good steward is to pray about how much of our time, our talents, and our money we should give The Lord each week.

Then we are to set aside our offering on the first day of every week.

The choice is yours; *are you going to be a faithful steward or are you going to be an ungrateful selfish disciple?*

AMEN